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Literature as a defining trait of the human umwelt: From and beyond Heidegger

Pierre-Louis Patoine

Sorbonne Nouvelle University
English Department
13 rue de Santeuil
75005 Paris, France
e-mail: pierre-louis.patoine@univ-paris3.fr

Jonathan Hope

Université du Québec à Montréal (Canada)
Literature Department
C.P. 8888 succ. Centre-ville
Montréal, QC H3C 3P8, Canada
e-mail: hope.jonathan@uqam.ca

Abstract. Writers and readers of literature are, among other things, biological entities that evolve under particular political (geographical/historical) conditions. A comparative study of certain texts by Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) can help us establish a fruitful interpretation of this threefold link between literary art, biology and politics. However, careful analysis reveals that Heidegger remains too rooted in an old-world, nationalistic and anthropocentric paradigm. We will attempt to rethink Heidegger's assumptions on the grounds that literature, a cultural practice, enables us to delineate our natural environment. By reformulating Heidegger's line of thought, we can more precisely address the plural structure of our biotic and political-literary experiences.

Keywords: literature; body; habitat; Heidegger; politics

Literature and habitat are entangled in complex configurations. What are the stakes of such configurations? As the human habitat is confronted with successive social and ecological crises, exploring this question becomes crucial, and we propose to do so following the lead of Martin Heidegger. Indeed, not only does Heidegger reflect on the fact that place, pervaded by time, is a defining trait of a meaningful existence, he also states that the development of such an existence is shaped by specific literary works. This is how we should understand his considerations on Friedrich Hölderlin, the prominent 19th-century German philosopher-poet associated with Romanticism

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and Idealism. Heidegger claims that canonical literary works, such as Hölderlin's, should enable a culture to unite itself and express its national uniqueness, in opposition to "others". We will survey Heidegger's thoughts on this matter, and then propose an alternative model of the eco-cultural role of literature, inspired by, but also critical of, the Heideggerean perspective.

Our paper is divided in three sections. First we will examine Heidegger's understanding of the ontological difference between the worlds of animals and men. Heidegger's interpretation of animality is a valuable one in that it integrates biology, and the crucial associated notion of *lived surrounding*, into the sphere of philosophy. However, as we shall see, Heidegger's openness to the animal is secondary to his concern for Man; likewise, whatever openness he has for environmentalism is second to his interest in nationalism. Thus, Heidegger's subsequent ideas on dwelling, rooted in a nostalgic feeling of lack, appear in need of a radical reinterpretation. This will bring us to our second point: the examination of the manner in which literary practices can be understood as one of *Homo sapiens'* techniques of dwelling. Literature appears as a species-specific technology through which humans relate to their geo-historical context, and live together on a shared territory. Once again Heidegger's ideas on the topic will prove to be useful, but will need to be rethought, in a third and final section, by actively integrating environmental concerns.

1. Animals, dwelling and lack

Martin Heidegger's major work, his *Being and Time*, addresses the fundamental "question of the meaning of being" (Heidegger 1996[1927]: xxiv). To elaborate this question, Heidegger basically recounts the adventures of an unfolding existence, *Dasein*. This philosophical hero in becoming is Heidegger's new definition of man, critical of those definitions put forth by anthropologists, psychologists, theologians and biologists. *Dasein*'s unique ability to use and recognize signs enables it to relate to the world, to time, to others and to itself. Bound to the world, *Dasein* develops a sense of locality that allows it to differentiate itself from neighbours, strangers and other aliens. Bound to time, *Dasein* develops a sense of history through which it promotes the uniqueness of its epoch. Thus Heidegger will examine the development of our basic (individual) existential structures to the transcendental ontological interrogations on the meaning of our (collective) historical and political experiences[1].

Two years after the publication of *Being and Time*, in 1929–1930, Heidegger will give a very dense seminar subsequently published under the title *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics. World, Finitude, Solitude.* As the title suggests, its goal is

[1] For more on this see Hope 2014; 2015.

nothing less than to interpret the underlying principles of philosophy, the most autonomous of all activities of *Dasein*. In the first part of the seminar, Heidegger claims that *Dasein*'s unique capacity for boredom, the oppression through time, is a condition to the advent of philosophy/ontology. In the second part of the seminar, and of particular interest to us here, Heidegger reflects on animality. Read in the light of *Being and Time*, this seminar appears as Heidegger's most accomplished attempt to distinguish Man's existence from the life of an animal. As if to insist on the uniqueness of human existence, a principle already firmly established in *Being in Time*, this seminar appears as a complementary text where Heidegger will drive in his idea that *Dasein* is *not* an animal: ontology is *not* consubstantial with zoology. Basically, Heidegger's move is to reflect on the essence of animality in order to better define, *a contrario*, the meaning of existence.

Heidegger's thoughts on the animal – and its difference from *Dasein* – can reasonably be extended to all cellular life: eubacteria, archaebacteria, and the more complex eukaryotes (domain under which are found, among others, protists, fungi, plants and animals). Indeed, Heidegger (2008a[1929–1930]: 212) writes to this effect: "[w]e must take up the task of defining the essence of the living being, *of characterizing the essence of life*, if only *with particular reference to the animal*." In a way, Heidegger seems to consider the animal as a metonymy of life: what he says about the animal could be said about any living system. Ultimately, we are to understand that *Dasein* is *not* a simple living thing, *bios* is *not* a limiting condition of human existence. The crux of Heidegger's argument rests on a three-tiered model of ontological categories represented by stones, animals and men. Stones or abiotic matter are worldless and know nothing; animals or biotic matter are poor in world and have limited knowledge; and Man is world-forming and is thus able to question his knowledge. (This is presented in the first sections of Part II, §§ 39–48, to which we will limit our reading.)

Despite the fact that Heidegger came up with these ideas some 85 years ago and that life sciences have flourished since then, his insights are still serviceable today. Indeed, he demonstrates openness to the animal by integrating it in his ontology. He questions the simplistic Modern divide between the rational Man and the non-rational animal. Thus, in a barely allusive critique of Descartes (2000[1637]: 153) who had claimed that philosophy enabled us to become "masters and possessors of nature", Heidegger writes "man is at once both master and servant of the world." (2008a[1929–1930]: 177). In a way, Heidegger seems to have foreseen some crucial tenets of Postmodernity by discerning the uniqueness of other life-forms, and the interrelatedness of all life through the lens of meaning. Indeed, Heidegger (2008a[1929–1930]: 192) mentions that his tripartition "does not entail hierarchical assessment". Heidegger states to this effect that the pyramid-like model championed in Max Scheler's last essays on philosophical anthropology (a model that influenced

Heidegger) – where matter props plant/animal life, that in turn props human spirit – is a "fundamental error" (Heidegger 2008a[1929–1930]: 192). Human spirit is not the culmination of everything. Lower life forms such as amoebae or infusoria are not any less perfect than higher ones such as apes or elephants. Heidegger (2008a[1929–1930]: 194) writes: "Every animal and every species of animal as such is just as perfect and complete as any other".

It is also worth mentioning that Heidegger's seminar on animality is not an exclusively philosophical meditation, but is equally informed by the latest developments in theoretical biology, critical of mechanistic, vitalist and Darwinist interpretations of life. Heidegger integrates into philosophy the works, among others, of Jakob von Uexküll, Hans Driesch and Frederik Buytendijk, effectively federating allies whose research demonstrates the corporeal and environmental completeness of the animal. Heidegger is especially receptive to Uexküll's monograph *Umwelt und Innenwelt der Tiere* (1909) in which the Baltic German biologist convincingly argues in favour of a species-specific correspondence between the exterior and the interior of a living organism. Organisms generate their own umwelt (lived surroundings) through their meaningful possibilities of action and perception, through the crystallization of habits into habitat. (The time is right to remind readers of the objective of our paper as it echoes Uexküll's assumption: how can the specifically human literary practices be integrated in the realm of organic activity, and recognized as a key element in the extension of Man's umwelt?)

Notwithstanding Heidegger's openness to Postmodernity and openness to the animal, he remains relatively close to the typically Modern idea according to which Man is the conductor of the vast orchestra of life. His conception of Nature, as presided over by human existence, seems anchored in a Modern *Weltanschauung*, and appears as an ontological continuation of 19th-century humanism. Indeed, Heidegger (2008a[1929–1930]: 193) claims that non-human life possesses less "of what is accessible". That is to say, not only is the physical range of the animal limited, even more importantly "the extent and manner in which an animal is able to penetrate whatever is limited to it is also limited" (Heidegger 2008a[1929–1930]: 193). Thus, the world of the animal is quantitatively and qualitatively poorer than that of Man – the world of the animal is in a state of poverty (*Armut*). On the other hand, the world of Man, writes Heidegger (2008a[1929–1930]: 193):

> is a rich one, greater in range, far more extensive in its penetrability, constantly extendable not only in its range […] but also in respect to the manner in which we can penetrate ever more deeply in this penetrability. Consequently we can characterize the relation man possesses to the world by referring to the extendability of everything that he relates to. This is why we speak of man as world-forming.

Heidegger gives a few telling examples. A bee is aware of blossoms, colours and scents, but is clueless about stamens, leaves and roots, *as* stamens, leaves and roots (that is to say as the organs of a plant responsible for, respectively: fertilization, photosynthesis and transpiration, and hydration and nourishment). A lizard basking in the sun on a rock knows nothing of the mineralogical constitution of the rock, and it is in no way able to ponder on the astrophysical nature of the sun. For a scurrying beetle, a blade of grass is a path, not a member of the *Gramineae* family, a dominant vegetation of the world, nor a "part of the bundle of hay with which the peasant will feed his cow" (Heidegger 2008a[1929–1930]: 198). Poor-in-world, the animal is in a state of "being deprived [*Entbehren*]" (2008a[1929–1930]: 195).

The weak spot in Heidegger's thesis – the reason why it appears out-dated – is that it continues to define the world in an anthropocentric manner. The bee knows nothing of botany; the lizard knows nothing of mineralogy and astrophysics; the beetle knows nothing of botany and agriculture. That is to say: the poorness in world of the animal is always determined in respect to the epistemic possibilities of Man, while the limits of the human scales of knowing are never questioned. In a way, Heidegger is not that far from the idea attributed to the ancient Protagoras, according to which Man is the measure of all things.[2] The result is that from a Heideggerean perspective the nature/culture divide is only partially weakened – in other words, it still completely prevails.

To be fair, we must mention that Heidegger's reflections on animality and on the lived world evolve in the course of his seminar. Heidegger's thoughts that we have recalled in the preceding paragraphs are, at best, introductory and require in-depth analysis. Heidegger (2008a[1929–1930]: 199) states to this effect: "we must attempt once again to acquire further insight into the essence of the animal and its animality. But we will no longer be able to proceed with the same naivety". Then, he spends the rest of the seminar explicating his ideas. That being said, in no way do Heidegger's subsequent thoughts contradict his early assumption, namely that the world and the knowledge of stones, animals and men are essentially different – all Heidegger does throughout the remainder of his seminar is detail this essential difference. The animal is poor in world and it is incapable of grasping things as they are, as they manifest themselves and "to reflect upon them as something thus grasped" (Heidegger 2008a[1929–1930]: 247). For the purposes of this paper, let us consider that what Heidegger says in his introductory paragraphs represents his thoughts with sufficient accuracy.

Following his 1929–30 seminar on animality, in the aftermath of the Second World War, Heidegger gives a lecture entitled "Building dwelling thinking". The context of this

[2] For complementary interpretations of Heidegger's debt to Protagoras, see Frings 1974 and Casadebaig 2015.

paper is essential: at the end of the war there is a sense of grief and loss as women and men, many of them Europeans, witness the destruction of their cities and homes. The war and the subsequent threat of atomic annihilation have made them lose their sense of direction and purpose. Gods have abandoned the world. Humans live, quite literally, on a God-forsaken rock, and they subjugate it to their techno-empirical will. Humans have forgotten how to dwell, to be, to cultivate and to care. Heidegger considers that humans must learn anew the meaning of dwelling, they must rediscover a state of peacefulness preserved from harm and danger, safeguarded. As Heidegger presents it, poetic dwelling of existence is historical, political, theophanic. To dwell means to reopen oneself to the fourfold (*Geviert*), an Aristotelian-like gathering of causes, namely: the world, the heavens, the mortals and the Gods.[3]

Admittedly, environmental undertones could be discerned in these meditations. Everything (the natural world, humans, culture, etc.) is at risk of destruction, we must take care of our home, that in which we live. Yet even if an ecosystemic understanding of dwelling may be hinted at by Heidegger's lecture, that is *not* its main point. Heidegger presents dwelling as a question of national urgency intended for the integrity of the European, and specifically German Man, as we will see in our discussion of his use of Hölderlin. This statement might appear surprising as Heidegger claims that the problems relating to dwelling, building and thinking transcend any ontic differences and touch the most general and authentic being of mankind. He writes:

> However hard and bitter, however hampering and threatening the lack of houses remains, the *proper plight of dwelling* does not lie merely in a lack of houses. The proper plight of dwelling is indeed older than the world wars with their destruction, older also than the increase of the earth's population and the condition of the industrial workers. The proper plight of dwelling lies in this, that mortals ever search anew for the essence of dwelling, that they *must ever learn to dwell*. (Heidegger 2008b[1951]: 363)

Even if Heidegger talks about mankind, his understanding of dwelling is nonetheless grounded on some sort of anthropocentric, Euro-nationalist ideal, historically situated and closely linked to the evolution of industrial Modernity. Why? Because by framing the problem of building, dwelling and thinking within the parameters of the fourfold, Heidegger loads the die, so to speak, as he considers it from an essentially European perspective. In other words, Heidegger asks us to presume that the European situation is unproblematically universal. This unjust presumption

[3] It is interesting to note the change of tone in Heidegger's thought. Whereas mankind's world-forming capacities in the 1930s denoted some kind of power in its duties towards Nature, by the end of the war mankind's technical capacities are perilous, to the point that all men and women revert to being endangered mortals.

explains why Heidegger's statements at that time make little sense when applied to, for example, North America, struggling with completely different problems, due to the wide expanses of uninhabited territories, and coming up with context-specific solutions, such as suburbs, skyscrapers and system homes.

To Heidegger, the world of humans is superior to the world of the animal in terms of epistemic possibilities and in terms of its ultimate nationalist goal. As we will see shortly, this bears on his understanding of the interlacement of dwelling and literature, an interlacement we can begin to elucidate by unravelling the nostalgic thread running through Heidegger's rhetoric of dwelling. Indeed, such rhetoric implies a positively valued earlier state, and a present lack: Gods have abandoned our world, we have forgotten how to dwell. Abandonment and forgetfulness are the modes through which such lack is experienced; and dwelling, cultivating and caring appear as possible remedies to this lack. Let us momentarily reflect on these remedies. From a simple physiological standpoint, building, dwelling, and cultivating are gestures made necessary by various lacks: the absence of warmth forces us to build and to dwell within an artificial structure; the absence of readily available food forces us to cultivate the land. Such techniques as dwelling, building, and cultivating thus emanate from an inherent lack at the core of our (organic) being, a lack underlined by Heidegger in his seminar on animality when he states that a human learns how to exist "solely to the extent that such a demand transpires from out of an actual oppressiveness of Dasein as a whole." (Heidegger 2008a[1929–1930]: 172) In other words, *Dasein* acquires knowledge through the feeling of oppression (*Bedrängnis*, that Heidegger discovered in his first section on boredom), the feeling that one's being and one's abilities are deficient, inadequate.

This idea of an essential deficit in the heart of existence, a dialectic between absence and presence, is a recurring theme in different doctrines that share the stage of Postmodern thinking – hermeneutics, phenomenology, psychoanalysis, semiotics to name a few. But it is worth noting that this notion is also put into service in the life sciences. A case in point is the American biological anthropologist Terrence Deacon who uses similar terms in *Incomplete Nature* as he discusses the "abstential" essence of life: "longing, desire, passion, appetite, mourning, loss, aspiration – all are based on an analogous intrinsic incompleteness, an integral without-ness" (Deacon 2012: 2–3). For Deacon, it is through such incompleteness that the organism develops a semiotic and eventually linguistic understanding of the world. On this account, language, as a symbolic technology admirably mastered by the human animal, is no different from dwelling, building or cultivating. Indeed, many (if not most) uses of language are rooted in absence or lack: we use hundreds of words every day to evoke things that we cannot physically point to (things that are absent, impossible, false or fictitious), things that we lack and things that we desire. We use language to fill with presence

the "integral without-ness" of human experience. It is the oppressiveness of *Dasein* as a whole, the silence of the "God-forsaken rock" on which we live, which demands the exchange of words. Relearning how to dwell, relearning how to connect *Dasein* with the world and its elemental powers thus appears as a semiotic and, even more precisely *linguistic* endeavour, in which literary practices have a key role to play – as we shall now see.

2. Literary culture and collective dwelling

Indeed, literary culture, based on the tending and preserving of texts, can participate in the development of a community and its connection (or reconnection) with its place and time. This is exactly what Heidegger indicates in seminars and talks given in the 1930s and 1940s, devoted to his compatriot Hölderlin. It is important to remember that these studies on Hölderlin immediately follow Heidegger's unsatisfying mandate as rector of Freiburg University in 1933, one of his most explicit political engagements, a debacle in which he subscribed to Nazism and, to a certain extent, endorsed Hitler's devastating project. Moreover, these seminars continue straight into the Second World War, Europe's most barbaric legacy to the 20th century. This political and historical context is not an anecdotal bit of information, but determines Heidegger's conception of literature as a useful tool or activity around which a people gathers, and consolidates its national heritage and destiny. Heidegger saw (belatedly) that the raucous Hitler could not represent Germany's essence; this task could only be accomplished by Hölderlin, the subtler poet in tune with the creativity of language and its intrinsic relation to philosophical interrogation. In his essay "What are poets for?" devoted to the German-language poets Hölderlin and Rilke, Heidegger (2001[1946]: 129) claims that the poet thinks "from the temple of Being [fundamental ontology]" and is thus able to enhance, spur on (ethno)linguistic creativity. Only by properly hearing Hölderlin – *understanding*, after a century as did Rilke, his poetic composition – can we expect the return of the Gods, the reestablishment of a connection between a people and its habitat. For Heidegger, the homecoming of existence thus depends on our reception of Hölderlin.

This ethnolinguistic, nationalist interpretation of Heidegger's poetic analysis may appear surprising as Heidegger claims that Hölderlin's poetry transcends any ontic differences and fits squarely into the most general understanding of mankind. In his "Letter on 'Humanism' ", Heidegger writes in reference to Hölderlin's elegy *Homecoming*:

> the word [homeland] is thought here in an essential sense, not patriotically or nationalistically, but in terms of the history of being. The essence of the homeland […] is also mentioned with the intention of thinking the homelessness of

> contemporary human beings from the essence of being's history. […] [W]hen Hölderlin composes "Homecoming" he is concerned that his countrymen find their essence. He does not at all seek that essence in an egoism of his people. He seeks it rather in the context of a belongingness to the destiny of the West. But even the West is not thought regionally as the Occident in contrast to the Orient, nor merely as Europe, but rather world-historically out of nearness to the source. (Heidegger 1998[1946]: 257)

As was the case in his reflections on dwelling, Heidegger's alleged global definition of the homeland contrasts with his Western frame of reference. Heidegger is unable or unwilling to see the variety of world cultures, erased under the postulated universality of, for example, Hölderlin's notion of "Homecoming". We would not go as far as Paul Cloke and Owain Jones (2001: 661) who admonish Heidegger for "the sinister (nationalist) rustic romanticism which pervades [his] ideas". Heidegger's appreciation of provincial life set forth in his essay "Why do I stay in the provinces" (2010) indicates an acute understanding of regional differences and the threat represented by the hegemony specific to urban life. Yet had Heidegger travelled beyond his cherished Schwarzwald, maybe he would have identified more easily the cultural situatedness of his perspective and of his frame of reference.

Notwithstanding Heidegger's tendency to impose European modes of thinking onto the world, his question remains intact: how can we understand the link between literature as a creative linguistic practice and the collective inhabitation of a territory?

Again, Heidegger's meditations on dwelling prove to be valuable. In "Building dwelling thinking," Heidegger (2008b[1951]: 351) writes: "To dwell, to be set at peace, means to remain at peace within the free sphere that safeguards each thing in its nature. *The fundamental character of dwelling is this sparing and preserving*". In that it expresses the fourfold, dwelling spares mortals from the harshness and hostility of the outer world; it preserves them, it enables them to conserve and to maintain their existences. And mortals are spared and preserved, because, as they dwell in the fourfold, they nurse and nurture "that with which [they] stay: in things" (Heidegger 2008b[1951]: 353). In other words, as they dwell, mortals learn to cultivate and construct the meaningful things in their environment, "safeguard[ing] each thing in its nature" (2008b[1951]: 351). There is a parallel here between Heidegger's view of Hölderlin's work as a key to national homecoming and his definition of dwelling: both are meant to safeguard existences and the things of their environment, the things they relate to in their lived surroundings.

From a Heideggerean perspective, the collective inhabitation of a territory and literature (a creative linguistic practice), appear as closely associated efforts. Relearning how to dwell (in post-war Germany), and relearning the meaning of (Hölderlin's) literature are two ways to safeguard specific existences. Since literary practices are fundamentally epistemic activities of sharing, knowing and feeling, they participate in

the extension of what Heidegger calls *world-forming penetrability*. Indeed, literary texts produce the world we inhabit, they become key producers of umwelt when they are shared among a community and create a common understanding of this community's lived surroundings. In this sense, the canonical text, the recognized, well-loved literary work, is a form of settlement: like a physical building organizes a human milieu and generates possibilities of acting, the canonical text organizes the semiosphere, it organizes the environment and its possibilities of meaning. This conception of the text/settlement can be developed through the vision of German-Canadian geographer Kraft Eberhard von Maltzahn in his *Nature as Landscape* where he investigates the nature of the human life-world and criticizes the alienating force of Modern positivism (in other words, Man's techno-empirical transformation of the Earth into a "God-forsaken rock"). Von Maltzahn (1994: 116) writes:

> The built settlement as cultural form is the point of arrival, and it acts as a centre, generating fields of forces that express themselves in the form of paths. These directional paths subdivide the seemingly infinite extensions. The ordered space that emerges admits particular patterns and rhythms of action.

Here, the built settlement, the dwelling place is not only a cultural technique of preserving a community from an environment where warmth and food, for example, may be lacking. Rather, it becomes, through this compensation of lack, a matrix of possible actions, of ways of relating, penetrating and inhabiting an environment. In a similar way, the canonical text, which according to Juri Lotman occupies the centre of the semiosphere, generates paths for thought and experience, paths that are shared by the community which inhabits these texts. These paths determine common ways of seeing our milieu, common ways of speaking about and understanding our immediate environment.

Thus the world-forming capacity of an organism to interact with its surroundings gets externalized in technical artefacts (settlements, dwellings) and eventually in habits, codes and symbolical systems such as verbal language and literature.[4] Of course, a symbolic system can only be a collective technology, and Heidegger's philosophical project reflects upon collective existence. This is a point that has escaped many early commentators, who reduce Heidegger's thought to an individual-oriented existentialism marked by death and finitude. Watsuji Tetsurô, a Japanese philosopher of the 1930s' Kyoto School and interpreter of Heidegger's work, purveys this limited interpretation. In *Fûdo*, Watsuji claims to complete Heidegger's project by insisting on the being-toward-life of the collective where the interrelationship

[4] See Leroi-Gourhan 1964 for an interpretation of hominization as a progressive externalization of biological functions.

between individuals survives the individual death; it is through the continual finitude of the individual, through the unending chain of personal deaths, that the collective being persists (Watsuji 2011: 50). Although Heidegger's project does not call for Watsuji's amendment, in that collectivity was never so simply excluded from his ontology, Watsuji does make an interesting point by insisting on the notion of milieu or mediance, the geographical constitution of being. As Watsuji (2011: 44) explains, our experience of locality, of local climate for instance, is always a shared, dialogical socio-linguistic experience. For example, a snowstorm in Montreal or in Tartu is a physical event experienced through language, through past and present enunciations. These can be clichés used in daily dialogue, such as, "Oh no! Snow again!" or "What beautiful snow!" Alternatively they can also be found in a shared literary heritage. Through the exchange and circulation of these words, we discover ourselves, our collective being, within the local climate and geography. Thus, as an especially powerful form of language, literature gives shape to our collective experience of climate, habitat, and territory.

For example, we can consider one of Quebec's national poets, Émile Nelligan. Associated with the emergence and persistence of francophone culture in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when Canada was still completely controlled by the British Empire, Nelligan would become an important figure of *québécois* culture. A number of his poems would be taught in schools, and today anyone living in Quebec is expected to know such lines as "*Ah! comme la neige a neigé!* / *Ma vitre est un jardin de givre*" ("Ah! how the snow has snowed! / My window is a garden of frost") (Nelligan 2007[1902]: 215). Because they are so largely shared, these words have provided a way of experiencing the climatic and habitational event of frosted windows to an entire culture, allowing this culture to dwell together through this specific experience.

The same could be said of the canonical Christmas songs with which the winter season is launched in North America. From a strict Heideggerean perspective, we could hardly associate the poetry of Hölderlin or Nelligan in all their *authenticity* (admittedly, a dubious Heideggerean concept) to popular songs. Popular songs code our experience of the Christmas/winter holidays because they occupy the conventional core of the semiosphere. Played repeatedly on radios, in shopping malls and restaurants, they are obvious signs of capitalism's firm grip on our communities, of the industrialization and the commodification of our cultural relationship with seasonal changes. Contrary to the predictable and repetitive productions of pop culture, the Romantic poets would elevate their expressions and sentiments towards more noble goals. Notwithstanding the disdain towards mainstream culture that permeates Heideggerean philosophy, Christmas songs still generate a shared mode of dwelling. Like the words of Hölderlin or Nelligan, these songs mediate our

relationship to our living environment, filling the negative, silent space between the collective subject and its environment with meaning – however commodified it may be. When poetry reflects territory, it fills the silence – the site of the Heideggerean abandonment of the Gods –, and reminds us the forgotten art of dwelling, caring and tending. Thus, through singular uses of language, of rhetoric devices, of poetic and narrative forms, literature produces new modes of co-existing within a territory.

This buttresses Heidegger's point: the "homecoming of existence", the consolidation of a national heritage and destiny, are intrinsically linked to a literary culture and its creators. In other words, the literary institution, by definition a collective effort, participates in the association of a people and its territory. By communicating with itself through canonical texts – what Lotman (1990: 33) refers to as *auto-communication* – a culture codes itself. Like a grammar, the canonical text occupies the centre of the semiosphere, allowing self-preservation and structuration of a culture through time. It becomes a code through which meaning is organized and communicated, a model used to discriminate the meaningful from the un-meaningful. As such, the text is a site of *productivity*, to use the terms of another semiotician, Roland Barthes (2002: 448; our translation, P.-L. P., J. H.):

> a text is a productivity. […] Even written (fixed) it never ceases to work, to maintain a process of production. What does a text fashion? Language [*La langue*]. It deconstructs the language of communication, of representation, or expression […] and reconstructs another full language, with neither substance nor surface.

Literary works that attain the status of masterpieces serve to redefine our language, our cultural codes and habits, our possibilities of meaning and, among these possibilities, the representation through which we relate to our cultural and bio-physical territory. The reintroduction of the *bios* here is not random. Indeed, canonical literary texts determine the destiny of language, and language is a structuring factor of our biosemiotic habitat. In the words of Jesper Hoffmeyer (1996: 112), language is a "common dwelling place […] one large common *Umwelt*"). As such, canonical texts produce an environment of meaning, habits and codes that are interwoven with our organic mode of existence. The linguistic productivity of these texts enlarges and enlivens the horizon of meaning, truly bringing forth a community where perceptual and interpretative possibilities are never purely individual. Meaning is thus always co-meaning, shared within a community.

3. Communities, territories, and texts: New configurations

But this raises a legitimate question: which community? And which habitat for this community? From a Heideggerean perspective, the answer is rather straightforward: a literary masterpiece such as Hölderlin's allows for a nostalgic homecoming to a quintessentially European (Greek-German) historical-destinal being. Considering the fact that Heidegger was thinking of, and elaborating upon an early-20th-century vision of international geopolitics and cultural dynamics dominated by the nation-state, his answer is unsurprising. Indeed, the structure of modern languages, themselves shaped by their literary canons, is closely associated with the boundary-drawing Modern nation-states in which habitat and linguistic space are superimposed. This fact is evident in Modern colonialism. Although Germany did not engage in colonial expansion, the 19th century European nations that did, used their literary masterpieces as cultural and linguistic tools to enforce their hegemony; for example, Shakespeare was deliberately used by the British to propagate their values across their Empire.[5] In the second half of the 20th century, as most European empires collapsed, emerging nations reclaimed the strategy to reconstruct a national identity that would correspond to their newly freed territory. Local languages or dialects, such as *québécois*, would play an important role in the emancipation of these postcolonial nations that organized themselves around new literary texts.[6] In the 1960s, Quebec was undergoing its own postcolonial awakening, an intense period of social, cultural and political changes. The Quiet Revolution was marked by secularization, the creation of a welfare state and the construction of a new national identity. In this context, *québécois* poets such as Anne Hébert, Claude Gauvreau, and Gaston Miron will promote a dialectal French to the status of national language, a source of pride and a vector of collective destiny. By productively fashioning language (as Barthes would say) the poems penned by Hébert, Gauvreau and Miron rapidly accessed and transformed the core of the literary canon. They opened paths for thought and experience, they indicated potential ways of living together on a shared territory.[7]

But which territory? By the 21st century, in the face of global capitalism, new dynamics of conflict, unpredictably shifting populations, and the pervasive environ-

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5 See Viswanathan 1989 for a thorough analysis of the Indian case.

6 Incidentally, Heidegger will insist on a similar point in a series of later texts on Alemannic lyric poetry: thinking and expressing ourselves through language, with the poet who poetizes in our particular dialect, enables us to come home, installs us at home, helps us, mortals, to dwell in the fourfold. For a sympathetic and detailed analysis of this moment in Heidegger's thought, see Mugerauer 2008.

7 For more on the unique manner in which literature and nationalism were played out in Quebec, see Popovic 1992.

mental challenges, the dominance of the nation-state model in world organisation appears jeopardized. The question remains open as to how the human animal's linguistic abilities, literary exploits, lived surroundings, territorial dwellings and identity-forming processes interact to create new world structures. Indeed, in our global ecological context, it is crucial to create shared horizons of meaning large enough to embrace the whole biosphere, where local specificities and identities are articulated with international co-habitation. We cannot limit ourselves to national existences. This impossibility has appeared clearly in the past decades, notably with the paradigm-changing pictures of the Earth taken from space, such as the famous *Earthrise* taken by astronaut William Anders in 1968 during the Apollo 8 mission (Fig. 1).

Figure 1. Earthrise. Picture taken by William Anders, 1968. (Courtesy of NASA; public domain).[8]

[8] The image has been retrieved from http://www.hq.nasa.gov/office/pao/History/alsj/a410/AS8-14-2383HR.jpg.

Such pictures have shown the Earth, not national territories, as our real, and perhaps definitive, habitat. Thus, as thought-provoking as they are, Heidegger's ideas on animal worlds, and on Man's capacity to dwell through literature, must be enlarged. "Homecoming" can no longer be defined by national (ethnic-linguistic) boundaries, those unsurpassable ontic conditions that find their way into Heidegger's ontological understanding of dwelling and poetry. The oppressiveness of *Dasein* is shared by billions of humans and trillions of other living organisms coexisting on our small Earth. Reconnecting our existences with such a habitat, relearning how to dwell responsibly together will be done by the institution of a common semiosphere as large as our common biosphere. How can literature serve such a project? How can we preserve the wealth of local cultures and languages in such a context? Is it possible to establish a fair global literary canon that would give equal opportunity to every culture? These are questions that we as citizens of the 21st century will definitely need to ponder.

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Литература как определяющая черта человеческого умвельта: Начиная с Хайдеггера и далее

Писатели и читатели литературы являются, помимо всего прочего, биологическими существами, которые развиваются при определенных политических (географических и исторических) условиях. Сравнительное изучение некоторых текстов Мартина Хайдеггера может помочь нам плодотворно интерпретировать тройственную связь между литературой, биологией и политикой. Однако тщательный анализ показывает, что Хайдеггер излишне укоренен в националистической и антропоцентрической парадигме старого мира. Мы попытаемся заново пересмотреть предпосылки Хайдеггера, основываясь на идее, что литература как культурная практика позволяет очертить нашу окружающую среду. Переформулируя ход мыслей Хайдеггера, мы можем точнее обрисовать множественную структуру наших биотических и политико-литературных опытов.

Kirjandus kui inimese omailma määratlev tunnusjoon: Heideggeri ideedest lähtudes ja neid avardades

Lisaks muule on kirjanikud ja lugejad ka bioloogilised olendid, kes kujunevad välja teatavates poliitilistes (geograafilistes ning ajaloolistes) tingimustes. Martin Heideggeri (1889–1976) mõnede tekstide võrdlev uurimine võib meil aidata viljakalt interpreteerida kolmiksidet kirjanduskunsti, bioloogia ja poliitika vahel. Nende tekstide hoolikas analüüs näitab paraku, et Heidegger takerdub liigselt Vana Maailma rahvuskesksesse ja antropotsentristlikku paradigmasse. Me püüame Heideggeri eeldused uuesti üle vaadata, võttes lähtekohaks, et kirjandus kultuuripraktikana võimaldab visandada meie loomulikku keskkonda. Heideggeri mõttekäiku ümber sõnastades suudame täpsemalt käsitleda elusloodust puudutavate poliitiliskirjanduslike kogemuste mitmikstruktuuri.